

What's your communication style?

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Business communications has never been more complicated - Cell phones, video conferencing, e-mails, web content, correspondence, reports and presentations cause even the greatest writer or orator to stir with apprehension that their message is clearly understood. Each month this column will explore the many different ways each of us can learn to communicate more plainly.)

It's no secret that communication is one of the most important aspects of life. Usually, if we communicate well, things tend to go better. If we don't, it just adds another layer of problems to any situation.

Our personal communication styles can greatly influence our effectiveness at work, whether or not people like us, and how well our ideas are received by others. Next time you feel conflicted about an interaction with a co-worker, stop and think about your communication style and the style of the other person. Differing styles may be the root of the problem. Then, take steps to improve your communication by trying to eliminate poor communication habits and replace with positive ways of communicating.

The styles:

Passive---Passive communicators will typically go along with what everyone else says. They are peacemakers and will nod their head in agreement. They often do not stand up for themselves. However, as many irritations and annoyances build up, they will eventually have an outburst. Following the outburst, they will feel remorse. Passive communicators often feel anxious, depressed and hopeless.

Aggressive---Aggressive communicators will often express their views in a way that is disrespectful to others. An aggressive communicator may have low self-esteem or feel powerless. They may take out their personal frustrations by being outwardly hostile to others. Aggressive communicators are often alienated from others and tend to blame others for problems.

Passive-Aggressive---Passive-aggressive communicators will often appear to be agreeing with others on the surface only to disagree or sabotage the other person behind their back. For some reason, the passive-aggressive communicator feels that their only course of action is to subtly undermine those they disagree with rather than confront them. Passive-aggressive communicators often use sarcasm and use facial expressions that don't match their true feelings.

Assertive---Assertive communicators are able to clearly state feelings and opinions in a respectful way that does not undermine others. An assertive communicator remains calm during disagreements, expresses emotion appropriately, listens without interrupting, and will not allow others to manipulate them. Assertive communicators feel connected to other people and have the ability to address concerns as needed in a constructive manner without threatening others.

Obviously the “assertive” style is the best. If you are in one of the other categories and want to improve your communication skills, try these tips:

Be positive and confident. Eliminate qualifier and tag questions from your speech, such as: “I really don’t know what I am talking about, but....” Or “.....does that make sense?” Qualifier and tag questions sound weak.

Take responsibility for your actions and not the actions of others. Use “I” statements such as “I think we should....” Avoid using “you” statements. “You” statements sound accusatory.

Answer questions appropriately. Answer yes/no questions with a yes or no answer. Do not give overly explanatory answers unless asked. When asked for more information, give enough detail to make your point, but do not over explain.

Criticize fairly. Talk about the behavior, not the person. Mix compliments with criticism to balance out any negativity.

Stand your ground. When someone repeatedly asks you to do something you don’t want to do, try the broken record technique by simply repeating what you will or will not do.

Forgive others and work toward win-win situations. Don’t hold grudges and understand that everyone makes mistakes. Forgive yourself and others for mistakes. Just try to do better next time. Realize we are all human and making mistakes is just part of life.

Remember, being assertive means:

- Standing up for yourself and not letting others walk on you
- Expressing your feelings clearly and directly
- Striving to improve, not destroy, relationships
- Valuing others by giving compliments
- Redirecting others by criticizing behaviors, not the person
- Asking for what you need
- Setting limits and saying no when appropriate

We have a Winner!



Aspen Junge, Bureau of Environmental Remediation, was the winner of our March Proofreading Contest from our Plain Language column.

Aspen caught 11 out of the 12 official errors in the sample document.

She won a \$10 Subway gift card compliments of the Office of Communications staff.

Thanks to all that submitted an entry.